Brittany Gregory

LENS 5 – *Out of the Dust*

Reader-Response

**Purpose:** The purpose is to think about the lessons this text teaches – loss, self-worth, change, and progressing despite hardship – and relate it back to yourself and students.

**Audience:** Peers and other educators

**Genre:** Essay

**Engagement:** I'm taking pieces of the texts and relating it back into my life.

Loss is a universal experience that many readers can connect with – if it be the loss of a family member, a lose friend, a pet, and so on. In *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, the main character Billie Jo loses her mother in a fire. While that was happening, society was losing to the drought and famine. Maybe readers haven't experienced these types of loss first-hand, like losing their crops which leads to loss of income, or being the contributing factor in the loss of said loved one, but readers can sympathize with the main character. At least that's how I can relate to the story. I've lost loved ones, and it seems like the whole world should stop just for you, to give you time to cope. But it doesn't and that's the reality of life.

This story may be a bit of a heavy issue for students – the mother dying a charred, broken woman with her days-old deceased baby – but presented in the right manner, students can identify to it. Any book, when handled properly, can draw up a message for students to decipher.

Even if a reader wanted to bypass the death element, there are other good lessons throughout the text. The passage, on page 81, “How can such a flower find a way to bloom in this drought, in this wind? It blossomed at night, when the sun couldn't scorch it, when the wind was quiet, when there might have been a sip of dew to freshen it,” can be interpreted as adapting to one's environment. Change is as common an issue as loss, so exposing students to texts about change is a good way to introduce the concept. For me, seeing a young girl overcoming these troubles, through her simple, poetic writing really eased me into the text. It made me think about my own struggles and relate them outwardly. This piece of the text can also relate to people progressing despite hardship.

Also on page 222, the passage, “And I know now that all the time I was trying to get out of the dust, the fact is, what I am, I am because of the dust. And what I am is good enough. Even for me,” is a lesson about self-worth. This makes be think about reaching a point whereother's opinions of myself don't effect me, which is an ideal situation.